

# **DESERT DWELLERS DIGEST**

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BY  
TRI STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
BULLHEAD CITY, ARIZONA**

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## **GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE**

TriState Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 21902, Bullhead City, AZ 86439 or e-mail our web site at [azgenealogymail-websites@yahoo.com](mailto:azgenealogymail-websites@yahoo.com)

## **MEMBERSHIP & DUES**

The annual membership dues is \$20.00 per year for a single membership and \$25.00 per year for a family membership. The dues is due at the September meeting. Please send your membership dues to Membership Chairperson c/o The TriState Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 21902, Bullhead City, AZ 86439.

## **PRIMARY PURPOSE**

The TRI STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY was established in 1990. The society promotes further

interest in genealogy and family history. It also provides fellowship and assistance to those interested in these subjects.

## **EDITORIAL POLICY**

The TRI STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY assumes no responsibility for errors or opinions expressed by contributors. Information in this publication is obtained from correspondence, newsletters, press releases, the internet and miscellaneous sources, which, in many cases cannot be verified. Material may be reprinted; however, we do request that acknowledgment be given to the Society and/or Author.

## **MEETINGS**

Regular meetings are held from September thru May on the second Friday of each month from 10 am to 12 noon at **MOHAVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HARGROVE LIBRARY**, 3400 Highway 95, Bullhead City, Arizona 86442 928-758-2420

Some meetings will be held at other locations. These meeting will be scheduled, announced at meetings and corresponded to members before that meeting is held. There will also be a calendar of meetings posted to our web page.

## **TRISTATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY WEB PAGE**

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~azcanvtsgs/> Andrea Wetzstein is our coordinator. Please contact her at [azgenealogymail-websites@yahoo.com](mailto:azgenealogymail-websites@yahoo.com) with comments & suggestions.

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**Tri State Genealogy Society  
Minutes of Meeting  
September 11, 1009  
Mohave community College Library  
Bullhead City, Az**

Meeting was called to order by President Susan Zmrzel. Nine members and two guests were present. Guests were introduced and told us where they are in their research. Susan read a letter she sent to the VFW local chapter in Remembrance of 9-11-2001. Member John Woods lead us in a prayer for the Victims and their Families. Susan showed us where to go on Find A Grave to see the Memorials for the World Trade Center and the Pentagon Victims.

Minutes of the May 9th meeting were corrected and will stand as read.

Treasurer's Report balance as of May 30th was \$1094.45. Treasurer Mary Moffett paid our liability insurance bill and the balance for this meeting is \$744.45. Monies to be reimbursed for stamps, copies and a book purchase were presented by treasurer Mary Moffett . Susan made a motion to approve and Clarence seconded. Mary bought the book "Google Your Family Tree" for the Mohave Community College, Bullhead City Campus, Library.

The Fed of Genealogical Societies election information was explained by Patti Goodman.

Susan updated us on the Cemetery Project.

Officers for 2009 -2010 were elected

President Susan Zmrzel

Vice President Gayle Mendoza

Secretary Patti Goodman

Treasurer Mary Moffett

Meeting presentation was held and meeting closed at 12:00

Respectfully Submitted

Patti Goodman

## **FROM EASTMAN'S ONLINE GENEALOGY NEWSLETTER**

### **Convert PDF Documents to Word**

Posted by Dick Eastman on September 01, 2009

For years, files created in Adobe's PDF format (Portable Document Format) were considered "unbreakable." That is, PDF files were generally not capable of being converted to other formats. However, in the past five years or so, probably a dozen or more programs have appeared that will convert PDF files to Microsoft Word's .DOC format or to other formats. My favorite PDF-to-Word converter is web-based. It is free and it works on Windows, Macintosh, and Linux systems.

Nitro PDF Pty. Ltd. offers a number of PDF programs. I use PDF-to-Word and find that it accurately converts all the text. The fonts and text formatting occasionally get mixed up a bit although not badly. I can usually fix the "damage" within a minute or two in most any word processor.

Pictures, photos, vector images, and Excel charts contained within PDF files will also be maintained and will appear in the proper places within the newly-created .DOC file.

The next time you receive a PDF file that you would like to keep and use, don't re-type it. Go to <http://www.pdfword.com> and use the free conversion service offered there. You will need to upload the PDF file (a simple process), and the resultant .DOC file will be sent to your e-mail address within a few minutes.

#### Comments

I've tried this online service before. Sometimes I need to convert some classified PDF or personal PDF, so that online converters seem not that reliable to me. I'm using AnyBizSoft to convert PDF to Word for me, that's more accurate, even protected PDF can be converted. Pretty cool. <http://www.anypdftools.com/pdf-to-word.html#163>

Posted by: Melvin James | September 02, 2009 at 01:46 AM

I would like to recommend one more way to convert from PDF to Word format: using PDF Converter - <http://www.pdfdocconverterpro.com>  
With this program, you can convert the PDF file to Word or Excel, edit it, and then convert back to PDF if needed. It is very quick and easy and they also have a completely free version.

Posted by: Ron | September 02, 2009

## **Revolutionary Roots**

July 03, 2009

Did your ancestors fight in the American Revolution 233 years ago? Thousands of men answered the call to arms in 1776. These thousands probably have many millions of descendants today. Many Americans can find a Revolutionary War veteran in the family tree if they expend a bit of time and effort. Luckily, there are a number of online and offline sources to help you in that search.

Finding Revolutionary ancestors isn't much different than finding anyone else in your family tree. You always start with yourself and then work your way back, one generation at a time. You can search the online databases as well as the traditional resources, such as census records, vital records, and especially, Revolutionary War pension applications. However, you should be aware of several unique sources of records that contain information about Revolutionary War soldiers.

One excellent tutorial to read is "Finding Your Patriot: Basic Sources for Starting Revolutionary War Research" by Curt B. Witcher, available on Ancestry.com (without subscription) at:  
<http://www.ancestry.com/library/view/news/articles/1561.asp>

Once you have learned the basics of Revolutionary War records, you will want to search the Lineage Books of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In order to join the Society, members have to prove their descent from an ancestor who aided the American cause in the Revolutionary War. The DAR have spent hundreds of thousands of hours compiling Patriot Index lists of Revolutionary War ancestors of DAR members. The DAR Lineage Books are available online to Ancestry.com members at:  
<http://www.ancestry.com/search/DB.aspx?dbid=3174>

(This database is available to Ancestry.com paid subscribers; an Ancestry.com user ID and password are required.) The same information is available in printed DAR Lineage Books, available at most large genealogy libraries.

The DAR was founded in 1890. Early application papers supply the applicant's maiden name, husband's name, applicant's birthplace (but not the birth date), parents' names, chain of ancestors and their spouses leading back to the Revolutionary War, and discussion of patriot's service and sources for his/her service. Note that the chain of ancestors is only from parent to child and does not show all children born to parents.

Later papers give much more information. In the chain of ancestors: birth, marriage, and death dates and places. In the applicant's section: birth date and birthplace, marriage date, spouse's information (name, birth date, birthplace, date of death or divorce). Space for multiple spouses is provided. The applicant must also supply data on the patriot's marriages, children, and children's spouses.

Keep in mind that the DAR Lineage Books contain the lineage of accepted members. While these books often provide great clues about the lineage of American patriots, the lineages they provide are often undocumented. As with any undocumented secondary source, all aspects should be documented with further research. Also remember that they do not list all the Revolutionary War soldiers. These books only list those

who were identified as ancestors of DAR members.

More information about the many services of the Daughters of the American Revolution may be found at: <http://www.dar.org> However, you will not find online databases at that site.

The records of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) are another great resource. Their records are available online and on CD-ROM. The online database has over 230,000 records of patriots whose gravesites have been located or whose service has been documented by a descendant who joined the Sons of the American Revolution.

The SAR online database provides information about Revolutionary War soldiers, sailors, and others, but does not provide information about their descendants. It is up to you to build a family tree in the traditional manner to prove your descent from the listed patriot.

NOTE: Much of the data was reported to the Revolutionary War Graves Committee without citing any primary documents as evidence of service. As with genealogy information found anywhere else, you need to independently verify the information provided.

To access the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution online database, go to <http://www.rsar.org/rosters/findpatr.htm>

Finally, never overlook the best source of information: your family. Are you attending a family gathering this Fourth of July? If so, ask your relatives, especially your older relatives. They may know some family stories that you have not heard before. Keep in mind that many family stories have a mixture of truth and fiction interwoven in them, but they are always worth verifying. Who knows? Your aunt or uncle just may be able to provide a clue that helps you find information that previously eluded you.

## **Free Anti-Virus Programs**

August 09, 2009

I have no idea why this information isn't better known. Free anti-virus programs are some of the best bargains I know of for Windows users, and yet many people have never heard of them.

First of all, every Windows computer needs an anti-virus program running at all times. If you are running a Windows computer right now without up-to-date anti-virus software, your system will become infected with a virus sooner or later. In fact, your PC may be infected right now without your knowledge. Yet there is a free and easy method of avoiding most viruses.

If you already have an anti-virus program installed, there are several things you should know:

All anti-virus programs will slow the operation of your computer. This is inevitable. However, some anti-virus programs will slow your computer more than others. Generally speaking, the well-known, more sophisticated programs will slow the computer down more than the simpler ones. The free program I will describe slows a computer less than most of its competitors.

Almost all commercial anti-virus programs cost money to purchase, and then you find out that the program only works for a year. In fact, every anti-virus program must be updated daily or every few days to make sure it is always prepared for new virus that have recently been found. After twelve months, most commercial anti-virus programs will ask you to pay another \$30 to \$60 for another year's worth of updates. (Some programs will not ask for two years.) The free program I will describe is free to purchase and never

asks for any additional money.

The better-known commercial anti-virus programs seem to suffer from “feature-itis.” That is, the software producers keep adding more and more features to make the program do more and more. Common additions include anti-phishing features, anti-spyware, online identity protection, web site authentication, a firewall, anti-rootkit protection, and more. To be sure, some of these features may be very useful, especially for computer novices. Knowledgeable Windows users may find such features unnecessary since most of us can recognize phishing, spyware, and such things without additional software. Whether you deem these “extra features” to be useful or not, each adds bulk to the program, slows the computer down still more, and also probably increases the price. The free program I will describe is simple: it protects against viruses. However, the same software producer offers a free anti-spyware product and a free anti-rootkit product. In addition to the free products, the same company adds an even more sophisticated combination of features for a modest price, although not free.

NOTE: For more information on some of these terms, look at the following:

Virus - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virus>

Spyware - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spyware>

Phishing - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phishing>

Rootkit - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rootkit>

I have used several free anti-virus programs on the multiple computers that I maintain for myself and for others. After several years of using the different ones available, I have settled on one program that works as well as, or better than, the rest. It is simple to install and use and, best of all, the price is: FREE.

This free program can stop viruses from entering your Windows system. If your computer is already infected, the same program may be able to remove the virus (no program is ever guaranteed to be able to remove ALL viruses). The program is:

AVG Free Edition produced AVG Technologies CZ (formerly known as Grisoft)

AVG Free Edition is an excellent anti-virus program that stops viruses as well as most of the commercial products. Its effectiveness has been tested and verified by West Coast Labs, ICSA Laboratories and Virus Bulletin. I do not have proper virus testing capabilities, so I cannot test AVG myself. However, I will say that I have been using AVG Free Edition as the anti-virus program on one of my Windows XP systems for several years and have never had a virus on that system, despite the fact that it is exposed to the Internet and many web sites and e-mail messages every day. I have also installed AVG Free on quite a few of my clients' PCs and not one of them has contracted a virus since it was installed.

Obviously, the best thing about AVG Free Edition is its price: free. You can download it right now and start using it immediately. The program updates its anti-virus rules every few days to keep your protection at the maximum level possible.

AVG Free Edition does have several disadvantages, however. You need to be aware of these limitations:

AVG is licensed for private, non-commercial, single home computer use only. You cannot use it on any computer being used at work or at any corporation or for any commercial use whatsoever. It also may not be used in schools, charities, churches, or governmental organizations. AVG sells a commercial version for computers not allowed under the Free Edition license.

You may use AVG Free Edition on a maximum of one computer. If you own two or more computers, you may legally only use AVG Free Edition on one of them.

There is no tech support available for AVG Free Edition. Full tech support is available only with the commercial version.

Downloading the program and/or the updates may be slower for AVG Free Edition than for the commercial version. This strikes me as a minor limitation.

I am pleased with AVG Free Edition. In fact, a few months ago I needed to renew the subscription of a commercial anti-virus product I had been using in my other Windows computers. Since I was already using one copy of AVG Free Edition, I could not legally install a second copy in my other Windows systems. Instead, I purchased the “high end version: of the AVG free program: AVG Internet Security Home Edition, which is licensed for installation in three separate computers. The total cost to protect all three systems for one year was \$64.95. However, I chose the two-year option for \$96.99. That works out to \$16.17 per computer per year – a bargain when compared to the anti-virus programs I see at the local computer store. Unlike the free version, AVG Internet Security Home Edition includes full tech support from the producing company.

If you have a single Windows computer that needs anti-virus protection, I'd suggest that you look at AVG Free Edition at <http://free.avg.com>.

If you have more computers to protect or need still more protection for a single computer, I'd then suggest that you look at the company's commercial products. They work well and are cheaper than most competitive products.

#### Honorable Mentions

I don't have as much experience with these programs but will point out that they are also available free of charge. Some of them do allow for commercial use and may allow for installation on more than one computer:

avast! Antivirus Home Edition is a free antivirus product for non-commercial and home use only. Both of these conditions should be met! It is available free of charge for non-profits. The same company also offers avast! Professional Edition that can be used by businesses. More information may be found at [http://www.avast.co/eng/avast\\_4\\_home.html](http://www.avast.co/eng/avast_4_home.html).

SecureIT Free Edition is based on the award winning ClamAV antivirus engine. It provides real-time virus protection, real-time proactive spyware protection, a malware blocker, a personal firewall technology, and more. SecureIT Free Edition is compatible with Windows XP, Windows Vista and Windows 7. Best of all, it can be used on an unlimited number of home and business computers. More information may be found at: <http://www.fightspyware.net>.

Avira AntiVir provides antivirus, anti-spyware, firewall, e-mail protection, and even parental controls, all in one package. Avira also warns against fraud using falsified Facebook applications. You can obtain more information about this free product at <http://www.free-av.com>.

Panda Cloud Antivirus is a lightweight but powerful solution that provides security for computers that are connected to the Internet most of the time or even all of the time. The program is “cloud based.” That is, much of the computing is performed in other computers connected “in the cloud” via the Internet. As a result, the reduction in your local computer's processing speed is minimized. Panda Cloud Antivirus is a good solution for all Windows system but is especially suitable for modern “netbook” computers. More information may be found at <http://www.cloudantivirus.com>.

HouseCall by Trend Micro is a different kind of program from the above. It does not prevent viruses but

does tell you whether or not you already have a virus. If you think your computer is running slow or exhibits other “virus-like” symptoms, download and run Housecall at <http://housecall.trendmicro.com>.

Does your Windows computer have an anti-virus program installed and running with updates made within the past few days? If not, you need one of the above!

## **FROM THE FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE**

### **Questions & Answers**

Q. You often refer to “Family History Centers” in Family Tree Magazine. What is a Family History Center?

A. It’s a great resource for genealogists. Family History Centers (FHC) and FamilySearch Centers are branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ (LDS church) Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City.

FHCs are adjacent to LDS stakes; FamilySearch Centers aren’t—other than that, they’re pretty much the same. You don’t have to be a member of the LDS church to visit either type of facility.

The FHL has microfilmed genealogy records from all over the world, but not everyone can get to Utah to view them. But you can visit an FHC or FamilySearch Center near you to rent FHL microfilm for \$5.50 per roll. You also can use the center’s computers to search the FHL’s online catalog for microfilmed records that may name your ancestors, and to access several subscription genealogy Web sites.

Centers are staffed with volunteers who often can help you search the catalog, answer questions and offer advice on your search.

There are something like 4,500 FHCs and FamilySearch Centers all over the world. To find one near you, you can download our location directory as a PDF or search by location on FamilySearch.

Some tips for using an FHC/FamilySearch Center:

1. Call ahead for updated hours. It doesn’t hurt to call again the day of your visit to make sure the center’s open, especially for small facilities. Since the centers are volunteer-staffed, if the person who’s supposed to open that day is sick, or stuck at home in bad weather, there’s not necessarily always a back-up person waiting to fill in.
2. Have an idea of the records you’re looking for. You can search the FHL online catalog from home, print listings for records you want to rent, and bring them with you. If you want the center staff to help you use the catalog, know the place and time frame you’re interested in. (Unless you’re looking for family history books, which don’t circulate to FHCs/FamilySearch centers, you’ll search the catalog by a place or topic, not an ancestor’s name.)
3. Bring cash with you—film rental fees are due when you place the order, and most centers can’t take checks or credit.
4. Once you place your microfilm order, it can take four to six weeks to arrive. You’ll get a phone call when it does; you have about 30 days to stop in and view the film on the center’s microfilm readers.

5. Some centers have their own microfilm copies of popular records, such as
6. Censuses for the local area, as well as a small collection of books and other resources. Ask about these when you visit.

## **Finding Your Female Ancestor in the Newspaper**

by Gena Philibert Ortega

Researching your elusive female ancestor can be difficult. Surname changes at marriage and the seemingly lack of records documenting the lives of women can make it difficult to conduct research in the same way you would for a male ancestor.

Newspapers are a rich source of genealogical information. They document a community on a daily or weekly basis. While they do contain the old genealogical standby, the obituary, they also contain so much more. Women can be found in all parts of the newspaper including feature articles, the society pages, advertisements, and more. Newspapers record weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, and other celebrations. They also document the tougher times like divorces, court cases, crime and deaths.

To find a comprehensive list of what genealogical data is available in a newspaper, consult *The Source : A Guide to American Genealogy*, edited by Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, page 564.

We often get stuck in the rut of just searching for obituaries in newspapers. While obituaries can be helpful, they should be only one of the places you should look for your ancestor. Geneablogger Amy Coffin, whose blog can be found at <http://wetree.blogspot.com/>, points out, "Don't ignore local newspapers when searching for information on female ancestors. Little surprises are often found in the society sections and other areas of the pages. Women often belonged to church societies and local social groups. Young girls' names were listed as participants in school pageants. When company came to town or locals visited other areas, their travels were mentioned in the news. Searching for female ancestors in historical newspapers may provide a glimpse of these women's lives as well as clues about other family members, friends and acquaintances."

Women were members of religious, social and fraternal organizations. A newspaper's religion pages may show pictures and detail events that women were involved in. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, an organization your ancestor may have been involved in if she was against the use of alcohol, had its members write articles that appeared in the newspaper. Organizations held events, did charity work and celebrated, all activities that would have been documented through newspaper photographs and articles.

And what about that obituary? When reading an obituary, pay careful attention to family member's names. Genealogist Dae Powell, whose website *Shoestring Genealogy* can be found at <http://shoestringgenealogy.com/>, reminds us that an obituary may be the source for identifying a woman's maiden name. The surnames of brothers listed in an obituary can provide you with a woman's maiden name. Also take note that deaths may be reported in many different ways in a newspaper. They may be found in funeral notices, death notices, obituaries, memorials and family thank you's. If the death was due to an accident or a homicide/suicide, there will be feature articles about the event and ongoing trial coverage. Legal notices may exist to notify the community of an estate sale or a probate case. If the deceased was ill prior to death, there may be a small notice informing the community about the illness and reporting on family and friends who visited her during the illness.

Newspapers can be found online through various providers including WorldVitalRecords. State digital newspaper projects are scanning older newspapers and making them accessible online. Some examples of

state newspaper projects include Utah <http://digitalnewspapers.org/> , Florida <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/flnews/> , and Washington, [http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/newspapers\\_wsl.aspx](http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/newspapers_wsl.aspx) . The U.S. Newspaper Program has a list of states who received grant monies to catalog and preserve newspapers. The corresponding website for each state can be found at <http://www.neh.gov/projects/usnp.html> . In addition, microfilmed newspapers for the locality you are researching may be located at state libraries or archives, public and university libraries as well as historical societies. The Kansas State Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org/index.htm> , has a collection of microfilmed newspapers for locations throughout the United States. You may borrow these newspapers through interlibrary loan.

When searching for newspapers for your ancestor's locality, remember that the local paper wasn't the only one that may mention your ancestor. More than one newspaper could have been reporting on a city, regional or even county level. One area could have had more than one newspaper that served it. In addition, don't stop your search at the local newspaper, look for newspapers that you ancestor may have read that focused on their religion or ethnic group.

Yes, newspaper research can be time consuming and difficult. Not all newspapers are indexed which means that you will have to search by reading multiple issues of the newspaper for the years spanning your ancestor's life. But in the end, newspapers can bring your female ancestor to life.

## **Genealogy Insider's Guide to Acronyms**

September 17, 2009

by Diane Haddad

Like any pursuit, genealogy has its share of abbreviations for prominent organizations, go-to resources and often-used terms.

Need help with the alphabet soup? Use our guide to common genealogy acronyms you'll encounter at the library, on Web sites, and in conversations with fellow family historians. We've included special pronunciations where necessary, and links to organizations or online resources where possible.

Check our Genealogy Glossary, too, for definitions to unfamiliar family history terms.

AAGG: African-American Genealogy Group

AAHGS: Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

ACPL: Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Ind.

AGBI: American Genealogical-Biographical Index

AAD: Access to Archival Databases (part of NARA's Web site)

AIC: American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

APG: Association of Professional Genealogists

ARC: Archival Research Catalog (part of NARA's Web site)

BCG: Board for Certification of Genealogists

CG: Certified Genealogist

CGL: Certified Genealogical Lecturer

CMSR: Compiled Military Service Record

CWSS: Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System

DAR: Daughters of the American Revolution (also NSDAR: National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution)

ED: Enumeration District, a geographical division defined for a US census

FEEFHS (“feef-us”): Federation of Eastern European Family History Societies  
 FGS: Federation of Genealogical Societies  
 FHC: Family History Center , a branch of the Family History Library  
  
 FHL: Family History Library in Salt Lake City  
 FHLC: FHL Catalog  
 FOIA: Freedom of Information Act  
 FTM: Family Tree Maker genealogy software  
 GAR: Grand Army of the Republic, a network of organizations for Civil War Union veterans  
 GEDCOM (“jed-com”) Genealogical Data Communication, the computer file format for family tree data  
 (.ged is the extension for these files)  
 GLO: Bureau of Land Management General Land Office  
 GPS: Genealogical Proof Standard  
 HQO: HeritageQuest Online genealogy databases, offered through many libraries  
 IAJGS: International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies  
 ICAPGen: (“eye-cap-jen”) International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists  
 IGI: International Genealogical Index  
 ISFHWE (“ish-fwee”): International Society of Family History Writers and Editors  
 ISOGG: International Society of Genetic Genealogy  
 LOC: Library of Congress  
 MRCA: Most Recent Common Ancestor, the most recent ancestor you share with another person  
 NARA (“nar-uh”): National Archives and Records Administration  
 NEHGS (sometimes called “hiss-jen”): New England Historic Genealogical Society  
 NGS: National Genealogical Society  
 OR: The Civil War reference The War of the Rebellion: A compilation of the Official Records of the Union  
 and Confederate Armies  
 PAF (“paf”): Personal Ancestral File genealogy software  
 PALAM (“pal-am”): Palatines to America  
 PERSI (“per-zee”): Periodical Source Index to family history articles in US and Canadian magazines and  
 journals  
 RM: RootsMagic genealogy software  
 SAR (“sar”): Sons of the American Revolution  
 SCGS: Southern California Genealogical Society  
 SCV: Sons of Confederate Veterans  
 SGGEE (sometimes pronounced “squeegee”): Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe  
 SMGF: Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation  
 SUVCW: Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War  
 TMG: The Master Genealogist genealogy software  
 UDC: United Daughters of the Confederacy  
 WRHS: Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio

## **FOUND ON INTERNET**

### **U.S. Bares ‘Alien Files’ Kept on Immigrants**

JANIE LORBER

Published: August 11, 2009

WASHINGTON — Immigration files containing a wealth of information collected by American border agents, some of it dating from the late 19th century, will be opened to the public soon and permanently preserved, providing intriguing nuggets about such famous immigrants or visitors as Alfred Hitchcock and Salvador Dalí.

But to millions of Americans, the real treasure will be clues about their own families' histories in the photographs, letters, interrogation transcripts and recordings that reflect the intense scrutiny faced by those trying to enter the United States during an era when it waged two world wars and adopted increasingly restrictive immigration policies.

Under an agreement signed this year, the files, on some 53 million people, will be gradually turned over by the Department of Homeland Security to the National Archives and Records Administration, beginning in 2010. The material, accounting for what officials describe as the largest addition of individual immigration records in the archives' history, will be indexed and made available to anyone.

At present, members of the public typically gain access to the documents, known as the Alien Files, by submitting a Freedom of Information Act request. But that is a cumbersome process that can take months to produce documents — and even then only photocopies, not originals — and, says Jeanie Low, a private consultant to family historians, deters many amateur genealogists unfamiliar with navigating government bureaucracy.

That is how Thelma Lai Chang obtained the 103-page file detailing immigration officials' interviews with her father, who immigrated from China as a 12-year-old in 1922. Under the Chinese Exclusion Act, most Chinese were then barred from entering the United States, and her father used a fake identity, claiming to be the son of a family already in the country.

"I cried because these are real documents," said Ms. Chang, who keeps a copy of her father's Alien File in her desk drawer at her San Francisco home. "All these years my dad used to talk about how he came, and this is proof to me of what he went through. I mean, all these questions for a little kid."

The decision to preserve the files is a victory for historical and immigrant groups that had been concerned because federal regulations permitted the government to destroy them once they were 75 years old.

The files contain a trove of information for historians of all fields. The file on Dalí, for example, the Spanish Surrealist who fled to the United States at the onset of World War II, contains more than 40 pages of travel documents.

But the material will be particularly significant to the descendants of persecuted immigrants like Jews who fled Europe before World War II.

"For so many of us, this is all that exists," said Rodger Rosenberg, whose great-grandparents escaped pogroms in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century. "So much was lost."

The public demand for access to government records like these has been fueled by Web sites, including Ancestry.com and Footnote.com, that have made it easier for people to do research even if they have no formal genealogical background.

"Before, it was just microfilm, constantly microfilm, going through hours of microfilm," said Adele Macher of Baltimore, who has been researching her family's Italian roots for 17 years. Once started, the research becomes almost an addiction, Mrs. Macher said as she pored over a copy of her great-aunt's Alien File, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

“This is like really putting a puzzle together,” she said, “and every piece that you find you want to find the next piece and the next piece and the next piece.”

Perhaps most exciting to researchers is that the files, which they will be able to see at the regional archives in San Bruno, Calif., and Kansas City, Mo., contain the original documents. Some include artifacts like wallets, 45-r.p.m. records and detailed maps that prospective immigrants drew by hand at the border to prove claims about where they came from.

“The bottom line is that you want as many original documents as possible,” said Schelly Talalay Dardashti, who writes *Tracing the Tribe*, a Jewish genealogy blog. “Each time something is written down, there is a chance of something getting screwed up. Each time a document is transcribed, mistakes will be made.”

Still, for many among a generation of immigrants who dodged the Chinese Exclusion Act by inventing their heritage or spinning elaborate tales of lost documentation, the accessibility is alarming. The exclusion act was repealed in 1943, but fears of deportation ran rampant in the 1950s, when, in the wake of the Chinese Revolution, McCarthyism tore Chinese immigrant families and communities apart.

Scarred by a period of what they recall as institutionalized racism, many aging immigrants refuse to discuss the Alien Files. They are afraid, they say, that lies told by young immigrants so many years ago and recorded in the files then could result in deportation now.

But officials of the Homeland Security Department say the files will be used for historical purposes, not law enforcement. Further, records will not be released until the immigrant in question has died or turned 100, and the names of the living will be redacted.

The files and immigration agents “have always been seen as the enemy,” said Jennie Lew, spokeswoman for a coalition that pushed for the new agreement. “We’re trying to make this the silver lining of years of discrimination.”

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